

GAME FACE

INDIANS SCOREB

MAGAZINE

ROBERTO ALOMAR

THE BEST
EVER!?



August 2000 GameFace

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Photo: Gregory Drezdson



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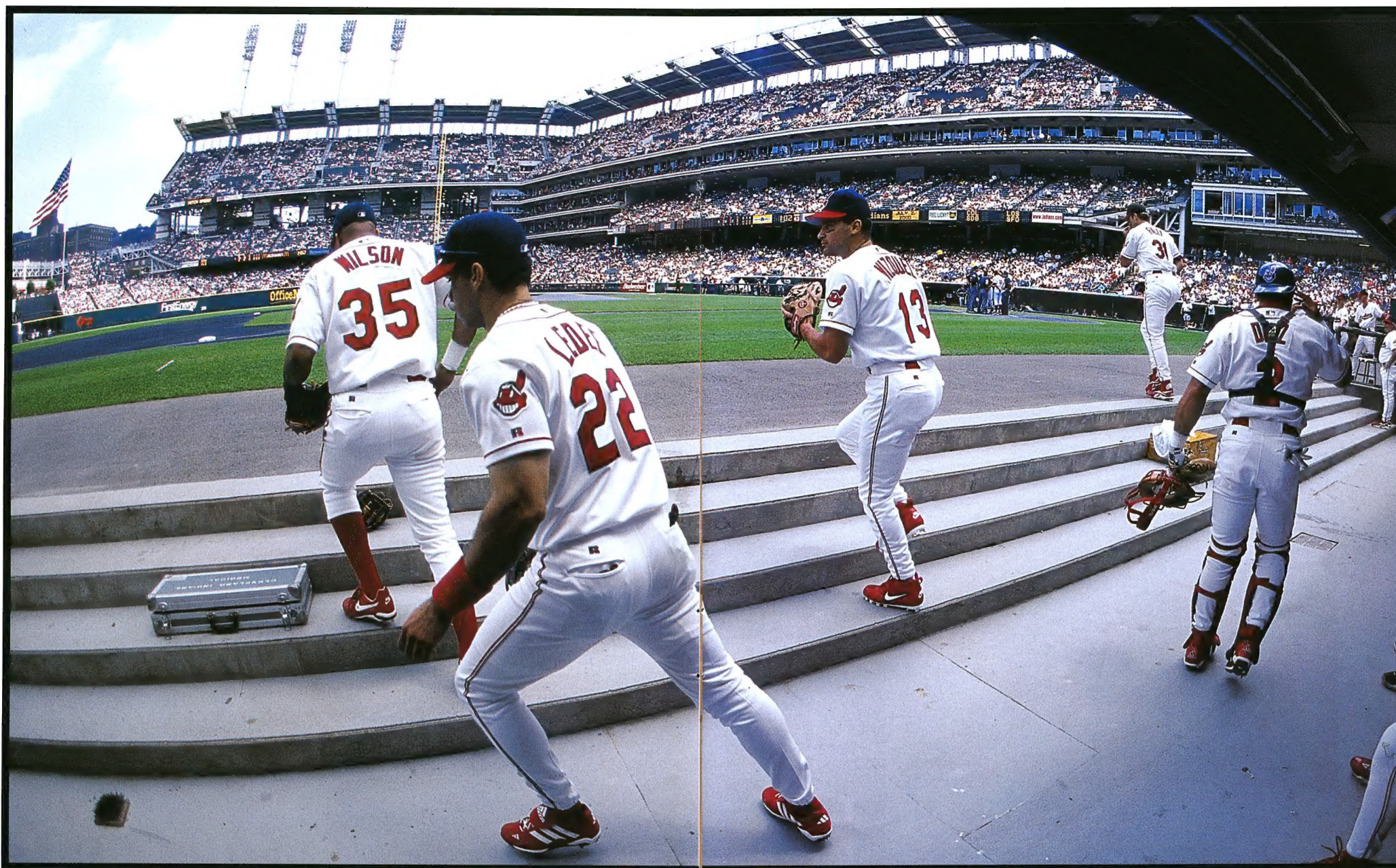


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WORK HORSE

by Jim Ingraham

The year was 1987, and a group of Seattle Mariners Minor Leaguers – who were taking part in the Instructional League that fall – were sitting around watching the World Series between the Twins and Cardinals.

The Minor Leaguers, who were about as far from the World Series as a group of professional players could be – they were bottom-rung Minor Leaguers in a Seattle organization that had finished with the worst record in the Ma-

jor Leagues the year before – were engaging in a game of “what-if?”

One of the players raised the following hypothetical question: If you were offered the chance to go to the Major Leagues tomorrow, would you go?



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Talk about a no-brainer, right?

Naturally, each of the Minor Leaguers in the room said, "sure," they'd go. Every player in the room that is, but one. David Allen Burba said "no," he wouldn't go.

"The rest of the guys couldn't believe I would say that," said Burba. "But I knew I wasn't ready. I knew that getting to the Major Leagues wasn't as hard as *staying* in the Major Leagues. I knew that I wasn't ready for the Major Leagues, and so I didn't even want to think about it until I felt I was ready."

Thirteen years later Burba is in his ninth year in the Major Leagues. He finally got to the point where he was ready. And when he did make it to the big leagues, he stayed.

Oh, sure, there were a couple of brief returns to the Minor Leagues for

a couple of tune-ups. But over the last decade, Burba has established himself as one of the most dependable starters in the Majors, a blue-collar pitcher who plays baseball with a football mentality: lots of grunting and sweating.

Pitching does not come easy to Burba, but working at pitching does. He's an indefatigable workman. If you are looking for someone to pull the plow for six or seven innings every fifth day, Burba's your man.

That's exactly what the Indians were looking for prior to the start of the 1998 season, when they traded highly regarded hitting prospect Sean Casey to the Reds for a pitcher who was born in Dayton and grew up in Springfield, OH.

In Burba's first two years with the Indians, he performed as advertised:

a rotation workhorse, averaging about 210 innings per year, and compiling a record of 30-19.

Pitching is hard work. Pitching in the Major Leagues is harder still. Pitching well in the Major Leagues is what's hardest of all.

That's why Burba wanted to make sure he was ready for it, when the call finally came. And there were no guarantees that the call would come at all.

Prior to that uncommonly mature comment to his fellow Instructional League teammates, Burba was coming off a second half of the 1987 season in which he was 1-6, with a 4.61 ERA, at Salinas (Calif.), in the final month of his first professional season.

The Mariners had drafted him in the second round of the June Draft, out of The Ohio State University.

"I KNEW THAT GETTING TO THE MAJOR LEAGUES WASN'T AS HARD AS STAYING IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES."

Dave Burba

A 1-6 record does not exactly qualify as hitting the ground running on your professional career.

"I think in the back of every athlete's mind you have questions about whether you're ever going to make it," said Burba. "But if you're a pro, you don't let those doubts affect you. I never really had a time in the Minor Leagues when I thought I wouldn't make it. The only time was in 1988, when I had elbow surgery. But that was more a medical thing than me wondering if I had the talent to make it."

Burba's talent first surfaced at Kenton Ridge High School, in Springfield. He was a three-sport star, excelling in football, basketball, and baseball.

He was honorable mention all-state in basketball, all-district in football, and all right in baseball.

There were some colleges that had an interest in him as a football or basketball player, and Burba enjoys telling people – truthfully – that Georgetown tried to recruit him as a basketball player.

"The Georgetown in Kentucky," says Burba, barely able to suppress his laugh.

Eventually, Burba decided that basketball probably wasn't where his future was.

"I was a 6-4 white guy who couldn't jump," he said. "Football, maybe I could have done that. I was a tight end and defensive end, and Eastern Kentucky had some interest in me. But I got tired of waking up all sore the next day."

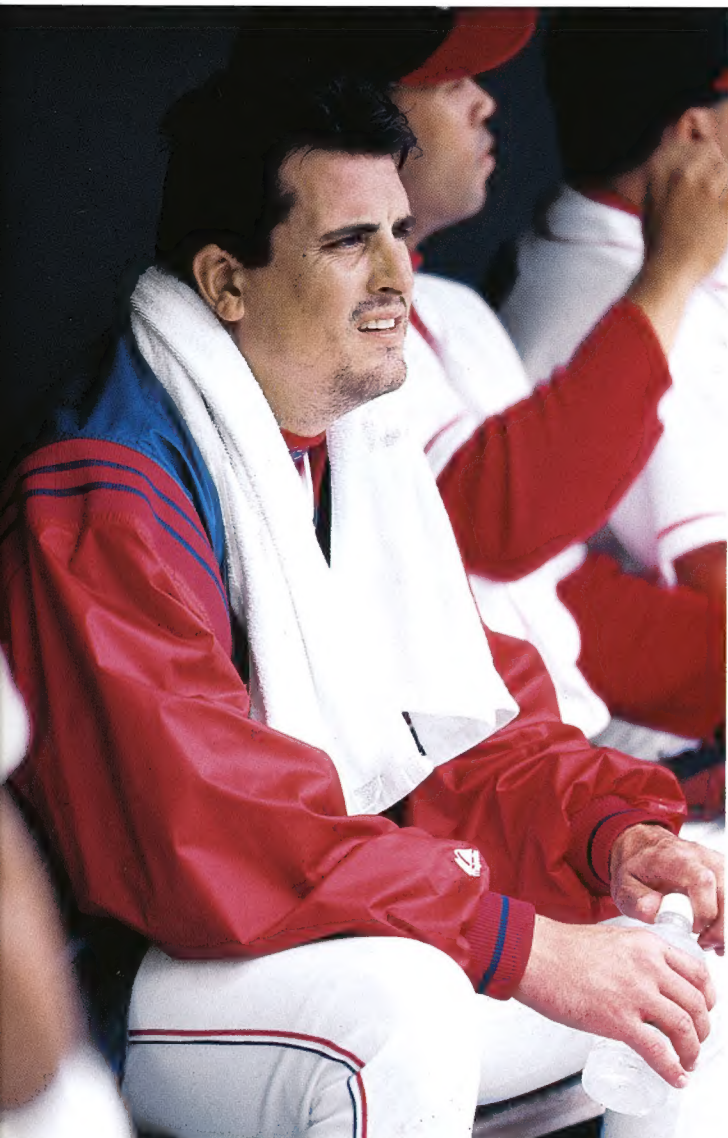


Photo: Gregory Drezdson

He won two games for the Mariners the following year, but after the 1991 season he was traded with fellow pitchers Mike Jackson and Billy Swift to San Francisco for Kevin Mitchell and Mike Remlinger.

It was while he was with the Giants that Burba went to finishing school as a pitcher.

The Giants used him as a reliever, which meant he got to sit in the bullpen day after day with some veteran relievers, and got to pick their brains.

"I would sit there and listen to guys like Mike Jackson, Dave Righetti, and Rod Beck talk about pitching," said Burba. "I learned a lot about pitching from those guys."

One of the most important lessons Burba received in his years in San Francisco (1992-95) came from Beck, who taught Burba how to throw a split-finger fastball, which has become Burba's bread-and-butter pitch.

"I just went up to Beck one day and asked him, 'How do you throw your splitter? When do you throw it? What situations? Do you throw it in 3-2 counts? With the bases loaded? Nobody on? When?' I just picked his brain," said Burba.

Burba started tinkering with the pitch and eventually felt comfortable enough to use it during a game.

He had never been a big strikeout pitcher prior to that. But once he learned the splitter, which can be a devastating strikeout pitch, Burba's strikeouts increased.

In 1994 and 1995 with the Giants, he averaged better than a strikeout per inning.

"It's a hard pitch for hitters to pick up," said Burba, who has a very large and strong hand, which allows him to throw the pitch. "It looks like a fastball coming in, but then when they swing, if you throw it right, the ball just dives."

At the time, Burba was pitching exclusively out of the bullpen for the Giants.

"Pitching out of the bullpen is a satisfying but a thankless job," he said. "It's satisfying because if you do your job, you know you're helping your team win, and after the game the starting pitcher will come up to you and thank you for helping him win it. There's nothing more satisfying than coming into a game and pitching out of a jam, and having the starter thank you for it after the game. So that's nice."

"But it's thankless because outside of your teammates, nobody really notices what you do. The only time

"PITCHING OUT OF THE BULLPEN IS A SATISFYING BUT A THANKLESS JOB..."

THE ONLY TIME MIDDLE RELIEVERS OR SETUP GUYS GET NOTICED IS WHEN THEY DON'T DO THEIR JOB."

Dave Burba

middle relievers or setup guys get noticed is when they don't do their job."

Burba didn't go back to starting again until the Giants traded him to the Reds in July of 1995. Burba, Mark Portugal, and Darren Lewis were traded by the Giants to Cincinnati for Deion Sanders and four Minor Leaguers.

Going to the Reds was like going home for Burba who grew up a Reds fan.

"When I was a kid growing up, I played baseball more than I watched it," he said. "But I followed the Big Red Machine, and it was always great to go to Riverfront Stadium to see Johnny Bench and Pete Rose and all those guys play."

Burba went 6-2 with a 3.27 ERA in 15 appearances (nine starts) for the Reds after the trade. And the following year he was put into the rotation, and started the next two years, during which he won 22 games.

"Every pitcher wants to either start or close," he said. "Financially, that's where the money is."

Burba was a quality starter for the Reds for two years, but then he was stunned when on the day before what would have been the first Opening Day assignment of his career, in 1998, he was traded to the Indians.

"I was disappointed initially because pitching on Opening Day was like a dream come true for me since it



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

THE BEST EVER!?

BY BILL NEEDLE



Photo: Gregory Drezdzon

Roberto Alomar is one of the few players in baseball history who can dive headfirst into first base, raise enough dirt to suggest the dust storms of the 1930s and still look like he hasn't broken a sweat.

In a game where players can build good reputations with false hustle, looking like they're taking charge by screaming the number of outs to everyone in the ballpark, Alomar seems so serene, so stately, so elegant it's not surprising he looks like he doesn't sweat.

He can slide home, slap the plate with his left hand as he goes by, and return to the dugout as though his uniform is made of some space-age, dirt-resistant fabric.

Same with grass stains. Alomar will often launch himself into short right-field after a grounder, skid 10 feet on the lawn to rob an opponent of a certain hit and get up with nary a whisp of green on his pants.

He's like "The Great Leslie," as portrayed by Tony Curtis in the classic movie comedy, *The Great Race*. In one scene, Curtis is trapped in a bakery as a pie fight breaks out. Every character in the scene eventually becomes covered with pie filling and whipped cream. All except *The Great Leslie*, that is. His bright, white suit remains unstained while his eyes and teeth continue to twinkle. So it is with Alomar.

Dirt, grass stains, and even pie filling don't stick to legends. Those problems are for mortals.

Roberto Alomar is clearly a baseball immortal. In fact, he may be the best second baseman ever.

Statistically, a case can be made on Alomar's behalf. There have been better hitters, but baseball may never have seen a better fielder. Those second basemen whose defensive reputations rival Alomar's, like Pittsburgh legend Bill Mazeroski, never hit like Alomar. Some second basemen have had higher batting averages, more hits in a season, or in a career, but few have delivered as often on the massive post-season stage, or played on as many World Series Champions.

Only the fact that Alomar, at age 32, is in his prime, while the reputations of

others have been bur-nished with the patina of generations, keeps him from being acclaimed as the greatest second baseman ever. History needs time to confer its titles. No doubt Alomar's accomplishments will hold up.

His competition is formidable. Most recently, there was Ryne Sandberg, who won 10 Gold Gloves at second base between 1981 and 1997. In Alomar's father's generation, Hall-of-Famer Joe Morgan won back-to-back National League MVP Awards in 1975 and 1976. Prior to that, such names as Rogers Hornsby, Charlie Gehringer, Frankie Frisch, Nelson Fox, Napoleon Lajoie, and Eddie Collins stand atop the list of the greatest second basemen ever to play the game.

To begin the comparison, look at Alomar's zest for the game. Those who disparage contemporary players by

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Robbie Alomar



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

saying old-timers played for love while today's stars play for money haven't been listening. Pete Rose wasn't the last Major Leaguer who'd have played for free.

"I love this game," Alomar says. "I think the reason God brought me into this world was to play baseball. I'm going to enjoy the game to the end."

"I come to Spring Training about a week early to get physically and mentally prepared for the season. I stay in the clubhouse late to get to know the new guys."

Sounds like a statement from Rogers Hornsby, who played over 70 years ago, instead of from Alomar, whose big league career began with the Padres at the age of 20 in 1988. Except for one thing: Hornsby was aloof, hated by his opponents, and often detested by his teammates. A loner, Hornsby would never hang around to "get to know the new guys." Though quiet, Alomar is respected throughout baseball and uni-

owner of seven of baseball's top single-season batting averages and the second-best career average, as well. His .424 batting mark in 1924 is the highest of the modern era and between 1921 and 1925, Hornsby hit .397, .401, .384, .424 and .403.

Impressive, to be sure, but nowhere near Hornsby's feats, even with an accounting for the differences between eras.

But Hornsby's teams didn't win as often as Alomar's, despite the huge statistics compiled by "The Rajah." Hornsby played on pennant-winning

teams in 1926, with the Cardinals, and in 1929, with the Cubs. His Cardinals won the World Series in 1926, despite his .250 batting average and just one extra-base hit. On the big stage of the World Series, Hornsby hit 67 points below his regular season batting average in '26; and in the '29 Series, his .238 batting mark was 144 points below his regular season mark of .380.

Alomar, like Hornsby, has played on two pennant-winning teams, the Blue Jays of 1992 and 1993. Unlike

Hornsby, Alomar's teams won both of the World Series in which they played and Alomar's career World Series batting average of .347 is 43 percentage points above his career batting mark of .304. Throw in batting averages of .474 in the 1991 ALCS and .423 in the 1992 ALCS, plus a .368 mark for the Indians in last year's Division Series against Boston, and Alomar's post-season batting average computes to .325, again above his career rate.

In the field, there is no comparison between Alomar and Hornsby. Alomar entered 2000 as the best fielding second baseman in AL history, with just 76 errors in nine AL seasons. Hornsby, in his nine prime seasons, committed 259.

In case one wonders about the teammates surrounding Hornsby and Alomar in their pennant-winning campaigns, consider this: In 1926, Hornsby had four teammates who batted .300 or better. In 1992, the first year Alomar played on a pennant-winner, he was the only Toronto regular who hit better than .300.

The edge in hitting goes to Hornsby. But if winning, not statistics, is what sports are about and if fielding by a second baseman matters to a team's overall success, give the edge to Roberto Alomar over Rogers Hornsby, who was the 13th player elected to Baseball's Hall of Fame.

Statistics, however revealing, do not evaluate the intangible aspects of baseball, perhaps the game in which intangibles – "the mental game" – matter more than any other sport. Above his numbers, it's Alomar's grasp of the mental side of the game that sets him apart from his contemporaries and ranks him at the top of all second basemen.

"You never had to tell Robbie anything about the game," says Reds manager Jack McKeon, who managed a rookie Alomar in San Diego in 1988. "He just always knew what to do in any situation he faced."

"I'm a student of baseball," Alomar says in the midst of his 13th big-league season. "I watch and I learn."

Orioles insiders tell a story of a play Alomar made in 1998, his last season in Baltimore before coming to Cleveland as a free agent. On defense against Boston, with a man on first and one out, the Sox's Mike Stanley hit a pop fly into short right field. While the ball was in flight, Alomar considered the following:

1. Stanley couldn't run well because of a sore leg and
2. The turf was very soft because of recent rain.

Those things considered, Alomar faked catching the pop fly and allowed the ball to hit the soggy turf.

"I knew the ground was wet and the ball wouldn't bounce away," Alomar remembers. "I picked up the ball and threw to first because Stanley was slow



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Entering 2000, Alomar had hit better than .300 in seven of the previous eight seasons. 1999 was his best overall year at-bat as he registered a .323 average and career-highs in runs scored (138), homers (24), and RBI (120).

**ENTERING 2000,
ALOMAR HAD HIT
BETTER THAN .300
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PREVIOUS EIGHT
SEASONS.**

getting down the line. The runner on first, thinking I was going to catch the pop up, stayed on the bag.

"Actually, it was [first baseman] 'Raffy' [Palmeiro] who made the play work. He tagged the runner on first before he stepped on the base because the runner was still forced to run to second. After he tagged the runner, he stepped on first.

"End of inning."

Crediting Palmeiro's savvy for completing a play Alomar created through his own instinctive brilliance seems to be typical Robbie, too. For a future Hall-of-Famer, he's quite self-effacing and quick to credit his teammates for success. There's no doubt Alomar is supremely confident, but it never seems to border on arrogance. Somewhat shy, as are many who are given gifts like his, Alomar seems more comfortable talking about his native Puerto Rico with a TV intern than he does explaining how he does what he does on a ballfield.

"He's just one of the guys," says Jim Thome. "A lot of great players don't mix well. Robbie does. He's not stuck up."

In 1988, when Alomar broke in with San Diego, baseball's best second baseman was Ryne Sandberg, who would gradually relinquish his title as the game's best as the 1990s began. Of his contemporaries, perhaps it's Sandberg who most closely rivals Alomar for the distinction as the best.

Offensively, Sandberg's home run and RBI production seem to give him an edge over Alomar, until one looks closely at the totals. Alomar, who had hit 151 career homers entering the current season, will not likely exceed Sandberg's career total of 282 round-trippers. Alomar, should he play 16 seasons like Sandberg, would need to average about 35 homers per year to approach 282 dingers. Alomar might play 16 seasons, but his career-high total of 24 homers came last year, so it's safe to say Sandberg's total and the 301 career homers of position leader Hornsby are safe.

Homers aside, though, it's likely Alomar will pass Sandberg in every other offensive category. Alomar has



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

already stolen more bases in 12 seasons than Sandberg did in 16. At the start of 2000, Alomar needed 379 hits, 32 doubles, 19 triples, and, surprisingly, just 233 RBI to exceed Sandberg's totals. Should one add four full seasons to Alomar's totals, using Alomar's season averages, the *Tribesman* projects to complete 16 seasons with 2676 hits (to Sandberg's 2386), 496 doubles (372), 77 triples (76), and 1105 RBI (to Sandberg's 1061).

Both Sandberg and Alomar are the best fielding second basemen in the history of their respective leagues. Entering 2000, Alomar's career fielding percentage of .987 trails the .989 Sandberg established between 1981 and 1997 with the Phillies and Cubs. Should Alomar earn his 10th Gold Glove this year, he will tie Sandberg for the most won by a second baseman.

In the spotlight of the post season, Sandberg – like Alomar – rose to the occasion. Sandberg's Cubs appeared in only two NLCS Games, in 1984 and 1989. In those series, against San Diego and San Francisco, Sandberg was su-

perb, compiling a batting average of .385 with five doubles, a triple, homer, and six RBI.

But Alomar gets the edge in post-season play. In his first two post-season appearances, in 1991 and 1992 with Toronto, Alomar hit .444 with two homers and eight RBI. By the way, Sandberg's Cubs lost to the Padres and Giants in '84 and '89. Alomar's Jays lost to the Twins in '91, but won the World Series the next season.

Strange to say, but if one sticks to the stats and gives Sandberg the edge over Alomar in fielding, one must then give the edge to Alomar in hitting. And if one were to ask a baseball fan which of the two was the better hitter and which the better fielder, nine of 10 fans would name Alomar the better fielder and Sandberg the better hitter, although the statistics prove otherwise, with the exception of career home runs.

Looming on the horizon of the contention that Alomar is the best second baseman ever is the shadow of the diminutive second baseman called "Little Joe," Hall-of-Famer Joe Morgan, whose

22-year big-league career reached its summit with "The Big Red Machine" of Cincinnati between 1972 and 1979.

Managed by Hall-of-Famer Sparky Anderson and paced by Hall-of-Famers Morgan, Tony Perez, Johnny Bench, and Baseball Greats Dave Concepcion and Pete Rose, Cincinnati won five NL Western Division titles and three NL pennants between 1972 and 1979. Morgan was named the NL's Most Valuable Player in both 1975 and 1976.

No doubt "The Big Red Machine" was one of the best teams in baseball annals, loaded with Hall-of-Famers and a threat to win the World Series every year. But where did Morgan fit into all the success?

Again, no question Joe Morgan remains one of the greatest second basemen ever. But was he better than Roberto Alomar? Difficult to say, but statistics offer a comparison.

Joe Morgan won the 1976 NL MVP Award with a batting average of .320 along with 27 homers and 111 RBI. Surrounded by the same Hall-of-Fame cast in 1975, Morgan hit .327 with 17 homers and 94 RBI. Experts agree Morgan was the catalyst that kept the "Machine" firing.

But was Morgan's 1975 MVP season any more valuable to the team that won the '75 Series over Boston than was Alomar's 1993 performance for the Blue Jays who reigned over Philadelphia? In 1993, Alomar hit .326, drilled 17 homers and drove in 93 runs, almost identical numbers to Morgan's in '75. In



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

the '75 World Series, Morgan hit .259. In the '93 Series, Alomar hit .480!

In 1976, the year in which the Reds dominated baseball with 102 victories and a sweep of the Yankees in the World Series, Morgan's MVP stats included a .227 post-season batting average. In Alomar's other Series-winning year, 1992, his post-season batting average was .320.

Career-wise, Alomar doesn't project to hit as many home runs as Morgan, but he should exceed "Little Joe" in hits and doubles if he plays 16 seasons and will exceed Morgan in RBI, triples, and runs scored if he plays 20 years – two fewer than Morgan.

Other Hall-of-Fame second basemen deserve mention. Charlie Gehringer and Frank Frisch were the AL and NL's best in the 1930s. Jackie Robinson and Nelson Fox owned the '50s. Bill Mazaroski, though not enshrined in Cooperstown, and Rod Carew, inducted in 1991, were almost without peer in the '60s as Morgan and Sandberg brought

Well, most of the time Alomar seems to appear calm and stain free. But there are exceptions...

second base play to the Roberto Alomar era in the early '90s. But each seems to fall short in comparison to Alomar in either hitting, fielding, or performance in post season.

Roberto Alomar. Hall-of-Famer? The Best Second Baseman Ever?

"I just live my life day-to-day," he says. "I just want to continue playing the game, and whatever happens, happens."

"Anyone would love to be in the Hall of Fame, to be thought of as the best. That's what we work so hard for so many years to achieve. To be in the Hall of Fame would be a dream come true."

As for the best ever? Like sweat, grass stains, dirt, and whipped cream on *The Great Leslie*, comparisons are for mere mortals. Roberto Alomar just plays baseball.

Spotlessly.

**"I JUST WANT TO
CONTINUE PLAYING
THE GAME, AND
WHATEVER HAPPENS,
HAPPENS."**

***Robbie Alomar, on his
chances for reaching
the Hall of Fame***

Rafael Nadal
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Long Life



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Enrique Wilson...

IN THE CLUTCH

by Steve Herrick

The trade the Indians and Minnesota Twins completed on February 21, 1994 didn't generate a lot of headlines at the time.

The reaction was understandable because the deal involved two Minor League players that fans weren't familiar with. The Indians sent Shawn Bryant, a left-handed pitcher, to the Twins for a switch-hitting infielder named Enrique Wilson, who was only 18 years old when the deal was made.

More than six years later, the trade is a steal for the Indians. And it's a deal Indians general manager John Hart clearly recalls. "I remember that trade very well," Hart said.

The Indians thought Bryant had a chance to make it in the Major Leagues, but were intrigued by Wilson's potential, even though he barely had two seasons of experience in professional baseball.

"We gave them a list of players we wanted," said Hart. "We did our homework. Wilson was a kid in rookie ball. It can be hard to evaluate a kid that age. Bryant was someone knocking on the door of the big leagues."

It didn't take Wilson long to start knocking on the door for a job with the Indians. He progressed quickly through the Tribe's Minor League system playing shortstop and was in Cleveland by the end of the 1997 season. Wilson spent part of the 1998 season with the Indians and was in the big leagues for the entire 1999 season.

While it seems like Wilson has been with the Indians for a long time, he only turned 25 on July 27. He was a valuable member of the Indians last season. Playing in a career-high 113 games, he batted .262 with two home runs and 24 RBI. Wilson also showed good pop with the bat with 22 doubles and stole five bases.

His biggest contribution came when third baseman Travis Fryman suffered a torn knee ligament in July. Playing at third for the first time in his career, Wilson was in the lineup every day for two months. He started 47 games at third and committed four errors in 114 total chances.

"Playing third was a big adjustment," said Wilson. "I never played there before and everything was new

for me. Fielding balls was different and so was throwing the ball."

"Enrique did a real solid job," said Indians manager Charlie Manuel. "He never played third before, but he did a good job. Enrique is a very good defensive player."

It's Wilson's glove that catches everyone's attention. He was considered a top Minor League shortstop as he worked his way to the big leagues. *BASEBALL AMERICA* named him the best defensive shortstop in the South Atlantic League in 1994 and again in the Carolina League in 1995.

The biggest problem with finding playing time for Wilson hasn't been his own ability. It's been the talent playing in front of him. The shortstop position has belonged to Omar Vizquel since the Indians traded for him following the 1993 season. The Indians toyed with the idea of making Wilson their second baseman, but that option was blocked when they signed Roberto Alomar following the 1998 season.

Vizquel and Alomar comprise one of the best double play combinations in baseball history. Vizquel has won

seven straight Gold Gloves while Alomar has won eight in his career.

That combination makes it tough for Wilson to see extended playing time, but he's not about to start complaining. In fact, he enjoys watching Vizquel and Alomar as much as anyone.

"I've learned a lot from Robbie and Omar," said Wilson. "They are two great players. I would never trade Omar, because he's the best shortstop in the game. It's not just his defense, but he can hit and run. Everyone knows why they signed Robbie. He's one of the best second basemen ever. I watch them and talk to them a lot."

Many baseball people think Wilson could play shortstop every day for many teams right now. He has excellent range, good hands, and a strong arm.

"Enrique has been so impressive at shortstop, he makes you think twice about turning him into a second baseman," Manuel said. "He's gotten to some balls that very few shortstops in the game could have gotten to. He can get to balls that Omar can't get to."

"Enrique is a good player," said Vizquel. "He's got a lot of range and I think he can hit, too. He's gotten better with experience. He'll be playing every day someday."

Wilson knows he's not the first promising young player stuck behind a couple of stars.

"When I play every day, I can prove myself," Wilson said. "I know I can play every day for some team. The only reason I don't play every day here is that this team has so many good players. I think I can do some things in the game that other guys can't do. It's hard to come from sitting on the bench for three or four days and then come in and get a hit."

Wilson achieved one of those rare baseball feats this season, an inside-the-park home run (against the Yankees Orlando Hernandez), May 21. Yankees outfielder Paul O'Neill fell trying to field the ball, which gave Wilson time to scramble around the bases. Later, Wilson said, "I was running out of gas coming around third... I'm glad I was the DH, so I didn't have to go back on the field."

Photos: Gregory Drezdson, all



Even though Wilson has been moved around, the Indians will always look at him as a shortstop first.

"We don't want Enrique ever to forget how to play short," Hart said.

"I know how to play short," said Wilson. "Someday they might need me to play shortstop again, and that's fine with me. They've told me that I'm the utility guy. I know I'm too young to be in that job, but sometimes you have to accept things. I will try to be ready for any opportunity, either here or somewhere else."

Wilson has been the subject of trade rumors the last several years. Every time the Indians go looking for pitching help, his name comes up. It happened last season, ironically, when the Indians were involved in trade talks with Anaheim for pitcher Chuck Finley. Those discussions broke down because the Indians didn't want to part with

EVEN THOUGH WILSON HAS BEEN MOVED AROUND, THE INDIANS WILL ALWAYS LOOK AT HIM AS A SHORTSTOP FIRST.

Wilson. The Indians finally signed Finley in December.

"I was thinking about it a lot," Wilson said of the trade rumors. "I had so many things on my mind. I thought they might trade me, but I'm glad they didn't. I watched ESPN all night, but they didn't mention my name, so at two in the morning I started to pack my stuff for our road trip."

Still, Wilson wants to play every day at some point in his career.

"My agent talked to John Hart, who said he wouldn't trade me, because I'm too valuable," he said. "If somebody got hurt, I can play short or second or third. It's hard when you know you can play every day somewhere else. I think there are a lot of good teams out there I could play second or short for. I have to get used to doing this. I have a good attitude. I don't complain about anything. I just work hard and wait for my chance to play."

"I like Enrique as a hitter," said Manuel. "I think

he can do a lot of good things with the bat. He's very aggressive. He makes contact and he can hit the ball all over the field. I think he could put up some decent power numbers if he played a lot. He's got some pop in his bat."

Wilson was off to a good start this season. Through June 30, he was batting .350 with two homers and 10 RBI. He hit an inside-the-park home run against the Yankees on May 21 and batted .342 in his first 20 starts of the season. Wilson was hitting well enough that he started five games as the DH, a spot normally reserved for home run hitters.

Wilson was born on July 27, 1975 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Thanks to his father, he started playing baseball at an early age.

"I learned a lot from him," Wilson said. "When I was a little kid he would take me to the field and hit me ground balls. He also taught me how to switch-hit. I was only six years old, but he worked a lot with me."

Wilson thinks he learned a lot of valuable lessons from his dad.

"He would hit me real hard ground balls," Wilson said. "The other kids didn't want him hitting to them, because they were afraid they'd get hurt. He also used to throw hard when he pitched to me."

Even though Wilson was only 14 years old, his father took him to the baseball school in the Dominican run by the Toronto Blue Jays. A few years later, Wilson signed with the Twins on April 15, 1992.

Wilson and his wife, Leydis, have one child, a daughter named Melisa, who was born on April 8, 1999.

He has served as an honorary spokesperson for "Big League Lunch," which stresses healthy nutrition to elementary school youngsters.

"It's fun to go out and talk to the kids," said Wilson. "I think they listen pretty well. They like to listen to the ballplayers."

It seems like it's only a matter of time until the kids *and* the rest of the Indians fans are familiar with Wilson's name.



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Still ZANY After 10 Years

by Slider

It's hard to believe it's been 10 years since I left my former home in the Fuchsia Islands to become a member of the Cleveland Indians. I was pretty scared when I made my debut at the old Stadium on July 29, 1990 – almost as scared as when I left my boyhood home. It didn't help that the Indians were between games of a doubleheader they'd eventually lose to the Yankees. But I had to "put up or shut up," as they say, and the chance to be the first Major League mascot from the Fuchsia Islands was too great an opportunity to be spoiled by a few childish fears.

Fortunately for me, thanks to a lot of players, Indians employees, and my closest pals, the "Slider Guiders," it's been a very quick decade and whatever fears I had upon coming to Cleveland went away almost immediately.

Just about everywhere I go – and believe me, I go to a lot of places, probably more than 2000 appearances since 1990, NOT counting home baseball games – people ask me about myself. But because Rule 6, Section 3, Paragraph 7, Clause 13 of the "Standard Mascots Code" forbids talking on the job, I just can't answer.

My mission is to spread laughter to players and fans alike. Below: Dave Burba thinks he's as funny as I am (he's not, but I have to admit he comes pretty close). Above: Being tall is fun, most of the time. At right: Einar Diaz is the easiest person to crack up.

Since it's my 10th anniversary with the Indians, the editors of GAME FACE thought it would be nice to celebrate by telling my life story and also by answering a few of the many questions (see page 88) I'm asked while "Wingin' Wienies" into the stands, having my picture taken with the little ones in KidsLand near Section 117 at Jacobs Field, helping with marriage proposals every so often, or when wobbling my massive belly on top of the dugouts between innings.

First of all, as long as I mentioned my belly, I'm actually not all that chubby for a native of the Fuchsia Islands. Many of my countrymen are REALLY bottom-heavy. I, however, am just big-boned, that's all. I'm really just about the same size as my Mom, Glider, and my Dad, Provider.

Dad, who you may have seen on Father's Day once or twice, was actually quite a pretty fair semi-pro pitcher in his day. He had a decent fastball, a fair curve, and good control as they called it back in the day before "control" became "command" and "speed" became "velocity."

But his best pitch, his "out" pitch, was, you guessed it, his slider. "Slider" is what they called my Dad on the sandlots of the Fuchsia Islands. And that's how I got my name. He was so proud of how he threw that pitch that when I was born, he and my Mom had no doubts that "Slider" would be my name. We don't have last names in my country. Just plain Slider, that's my full, entire name.

Mom was a waitress back home, working at a hamburger stand where they served little hamburgers with some grated onion, a squirt of mustard, and a slice of dill pickle. Somebody once told me there are places here in America where they serve the same kind of little hamburgers and they're called "Sliders." Imagine that. Mom served up plenty of little sliders in her waitress days and as a mom, served up one big one, too. Me.

My parents fell in love at first sight. My Dad loved those little hamburgers, and every chance he got he would go visit the place where my Mom was waitressing and order up a couple of dozen washed down by a citrus drink made from the morning dew on the plants in the high mountains back home. In the Fuchsias, it's called, "Hilltop Dew." Here, I think, there's another name for it.

Basically shy, unlike me, it took three or four hundred dozen burgers, about a week or so, before my Dad finally asked my Mom out on a date. Once they started dating, they became



Photo: Gregory Drezdson



inseparable, and my Dad finally proposed one warm tropical night over a drink that would become their “special” cocktail – a Fuzzy Navel.

I had a comfortable upbringing, my Dad working as a shag carpet installer and my Mom still waitressing. But one day, my Dad mistook himself for a piece of Fuchsia shag carpet and installed his leg on the floor of a customer’s bedroom. It took several paramedics to get him free. It made me realize I wasn’t cut out for carpet.

As I got older – and we got cable – I started to realize there was a whole other world away from the Fuchsias. I’d watch the San Diego Chicken on *The Game of the Week*, or Chief Noc-a-Homa (and his son, Noc-a-Single) on the Superstation and think, “Gee, I can do that. I can entertain people.” So I set my mind to become a sports mascot.

Believe me, it was as hard a climb for me through the mascot



minors to the mascot majors as it’s been for any Major League player. Bumpy bus rides, kids with sticky hands wanting to touch me – ever try to get chocolate syrup or bubble gum out of your fuzzy, Fuchsia fur? – low pay, bad food. Hot summer nights performing in dimly-lit Minor League ballparks with no shower facilities for mascots. Know what a week of unshowered, Fuchsia fur smells like? You, at least, can walk away from the smell. When I tried to walk away from the stench, it followed me. I WAS the smell.

That doesn’t include the rude and embarrassing questions about my personal life. Man! I have feelings, too. There’s a heart beating inside all this fur, you know. I’m not stuffed, or bobble-headed, like those Slider dolls you can buy at the Indians Team Shops.

I’m often asked if I have a girlfriend. No, I don’t. Oh, I’ve dated some. Helga, the Cleveland State Viking mascot, and I were an item for a while. But nothing lasting.

Sure, I’d like to settle down. I’d love to meet the right character. I’ve been trying to get to meet Miss Piggy for years. We almost met at the movie studio when she was doing *The Muppets Take Manhattan* and I was doing *Major League II*. But it never worked out. I had my own trailer on the set, too. Pretty impressive camper, just like stars Corbin Bernsen and Tom Berenger. And I did my own stunts, unlike, shall we say, some of the stars who were replaced by stunt doubles. Got to hang with guys like David Keith, too. He played the guy on the other team who was always a pain in the Indians behind. Good guy.

But none of that ever impressed Miss Piggy enough to visit me, much less go out to dinner or to a movie. She’s not really my dream girl, though. If I could settle down with any character in the whole, wide world it would definitely be Minnie. Whatta mouse! Perky personality, slender legs, polka-dotted dresses. That’s my idea of an ideal mate. But she’s been going with the same pip-squeak for 72 years now. Maybe one day they’ll break up...yeah, right!

I’m not lonely, though. I’ve made thousands of friends here in Cleveland at games, hospitals, civic events, and

cheese spilled on you from my clumsiness, as well. This year, the Indians have even added a "Fun Bunch" of kids.

It hasn't all been sunshine and roses here in Cleveland, though. That first day was rough; losing two to New York and making my debut between games. A lot of people blamed me. Hey! I wasn't playing. Friday nights when a few of my fans have been to The Flats before coming to the ballgame can be a bit hairy, too.

But the worst experience of my 10 years with the Indians had to be Game Four of the 1995 ALCS against Seattle here in Cleveland. I was on top of the Indians bullpen doing my thing, then BLAM! Next thing I know, I'm on the outfield grass, and my leg is simply killing me.

But I don't think I was as upset when I fell as former Indians pitcher Julian Tavares was. He seemed to have tears in his eyes when he came up to me. "Slider, you OK? You OK?" was all he could say. He took the fall worse than I did.

But I weathered the injury in time to make it to the World Series, one of two I've been fortunate enough to attend. I've been to just about every All-Star Game since 1994 and look forward to a few more World Series here in Cleveland before I retire.

Briefly, that's my life. I love it here in Cleveland, and I love you all as well. I hope to be making you smile for many years to come. It's my goal to one day hear a mom or dad tell



I'm really proud of helping to start the Friendship Tour which has brought my fellow mascots and me to lots of sick kids who could use a smile. Here we are at The Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital in 1997.

a child, "You know, when I was your age, my mom and dad brought me to see Slider and now I'm bringing you."

Parents and children. Isn't that what baseball's all about?

Check out the answers to the questions most frequently asked of Slider on page 88.

NOW YOU CAN CALL YOUR OWN GAME

During your next visit to Jacobs Field, be sure to visit the Indians/Bud Light FanCast Booth. The FanCast Booth has been improved to include video tape capabilities. Reserve an inning or two in the broadcast booth and take home a souvenir video tape of the game's action with your voiceover calling the play-by-play. Please call 216.420.4262 to reserve your game and inning.

All proceeds benefit Cleveland Indians Charities.



Photos: Gregory Drezdron



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Photo: Gregory Drezdson

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This handsome tapestry, created in the Tribe's colors of navy, red, and white, brings to life great memories from one of the greatest eras in the storied history of the Cleveland Indians.

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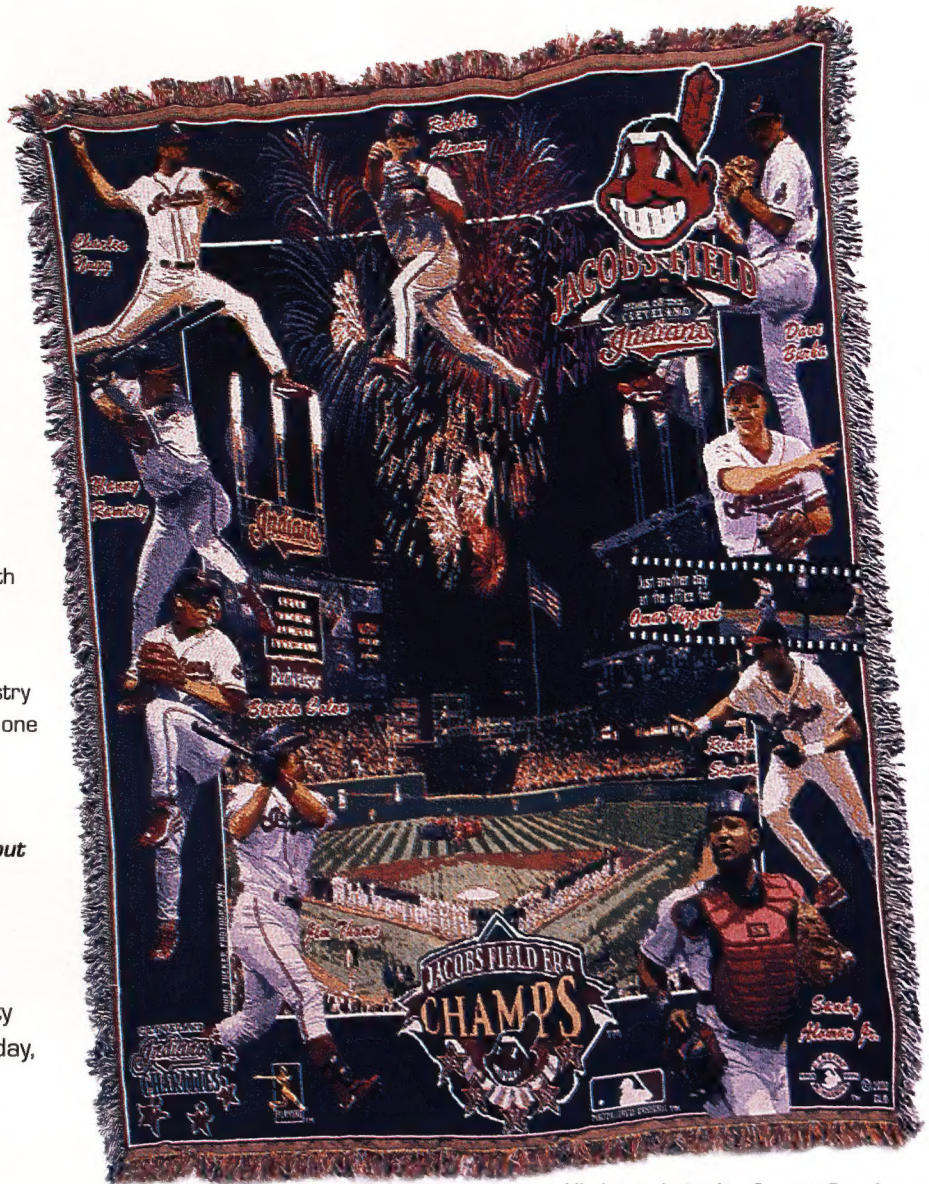
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All player photos by: Gregory Drezdson

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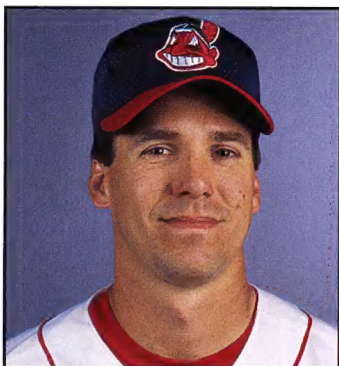
**Chuck
FINLEY**

31

Age: 37, born November 26, 1962
in Monroe, LA

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'6" Wt: 226



**Travis
FRYMAN**

17

Age: 31, born March 25, 1969
in Lexington, KY

Position: Infielder

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'1" Wt: 195



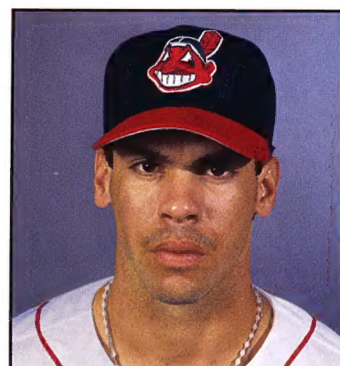
**Steve
KARSAY**

20

Age: 28, born March 24, 1972
in Flushing, NY

Position: Pitcher

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'3" Wt: 209



**Ricky
LEDEE**

23

Age: 26, born November 22, 1973
in Ponce, PR

Position: Outfielder

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'1" Wt: 200



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Our
DYNAMIC
Duo



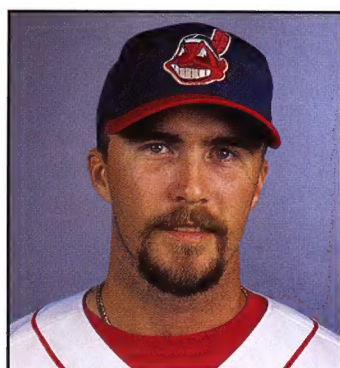
**Kenny
LOFTON**

7

Age: 33, born May 31, 1967
in East Chicago, IN

Position: Outfielder

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'0" Wt: 180



**Tom
MARTIN**

36

Age: 30, born May 21, 1970
in Charleston, SC

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'1" Wt: 200



**Charles
NAGY**

41

Age: 33, born May 5, 1967
in Fairfield, CT

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/R Ht: 6'3" Wt: 200



**Jaime
NAVARRO**

37

Age: 32, born March 27, 1968
in Bayamon, PR

Position: Pitcher

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'0" Wt: 250

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ONLINE AUCTIONS

Memorabilia collectors have a new online destination — www.indians.com

*Cleveland Indians Charities
will make four autographed items
available per week for online auction via
the Tribe's website, www.indians.com*

Weekly auctions begin each Monday at 3PM and run until noon the following Monday. The highest bidders at the conclusion of each weekly auction will be contacted via e-mail by the Indians for payment arrangements.

Payments can be made by MasterCard, the preferred credit card of the Cleveland Indians, or by VISA, Discover, American Express or by check made payable to Cleveland Indians Charities. The items will be mailed upon receipt of payment.

The highest bidders will have 48 hours to respond to the e-mail notification of their bid selection before the next highest bidder will be awarded the item. Minimum bids for each item will range from \$20 - \$100. All items will include a letter of authenticity.

All proceeds benefit Cleveland Indians Charities which supports youth education and recreation programs in the Greater Cleveland area.

Auction items will vary each week, but may include banners, autographed jerseys, bats, helmets, and photographs.

Photo: Gregory Drezdon

